

Chapter 5

Emotions:

Too Many, Too Often

Emotions. Too many, too often, too intense. That pretty much sums up my experience with emotions. Usually I feel like I'm standing under a waterfall, bracing just to keep upright, as the emotions dump on my head.

Bo: Having so many emotions really gets to me. I hate getting upset and angry. And I really, really hate getting into trouble, especially when I'm in trouble because I lost my temper.

Helen: I like having the good emotions, though. I am usually pretty upbeat. I mean, I have a good time a lot of the time.

Maddy: Yeah. Me too, in between the depressed part. Maybe the two are linked somehow? Like, I have to fight hard not to be sad, so when I have a chance to be happy, I really go for it.

Bo: I know what you mean. When I get to hang around with you two, I can put the worry aside and have a good time. I don't worry about what I say or do, because I know you guys are my friends.

Maddy: Three cheers for the good times!

Helen: Hip, Hip, Hooray

Maddy: I was speaking figuratively....

Helen: Oops.

The Good Emotions AND the Bad: The Prefrontal Cortex

One reason we have a lot of emotions and they all seem bigger than the emotions of some kids without AD/HD is that emotions, along with events, are supposed to be filtered by the prefrontal cortex.

Remember the example of the fly and the airplane and the math? That was an example of a person with AD/HD paying attention to lots of things equally, instead of paying attention to the important thing, math, and tuning out the unimportant stuff, the fly and the airplane. Although the fly and the airplane might be more interesting, they are not more important than math when it comes to homework and tests. Emotions also aren't filtered correctly in AD/HD brains.

Ordinarily, the prefrontal cortex helps people decide how to react emotionally, giving them a chance to think about their feelings and maybe tone down an initial emotional reaction. When people without AD/HD get angry, the anger takes a brief time-out in the frontal cortex. People without AD/HD are able to delay the anger long enough to think about whether to explode.

I, and maybe most people with AD/HD, skip the delay part and move straight to the explosion.

This is a big problem for me, and something I'm always dealing with. Right now, I am learning to wait, so I can think about why I feel what I feel, and how I should react. For example, some guy says something stupid to me. But instead of blowing up, which would ordinarily be my first, second, and third reactions, I am trying to think, "I'm mad but now that I think about it, he didn't say that to make me mad, so maybe I can make myself wait for a better time to explode." Or at least, "Yes, he said that to make me mad, but if I get mad now, I will live in detention the rest of my life. So I will explode after class and clamp my mouth shut until then."

Still, the explosion sometimes gets there before my thoughts do.

This might also explain why those of us who have AD/HD have such a good time. When good things happen, we skip the delay part and go straight to the happiness. And maybe that's where some of the creativity, the something extra, comes from, too. Maybe the time that people without AD/HD spend sorting and filtering in the frontal cortex strips away ideas and emotions that people with AD/HD use. Maybe this helps us see things differently; connect things most people don't. Also, maybe bypassing the prefrontal cortex (or just overwhelming it with quantity!) lets us go directly to compassion and empathy without pausing to even think about ourselves.

It's an idea, anyway. One that probably skipped right past my prefrontal cortex.

Another thing. When something grabs my attention, it gets all of my attention. Maybe that's because the attention skips the waiting room area of the prefrontal cortex. Otherwise, maybe the prefrontal cortex would logically evaluate where my attention *should* be focused, instead of letting me get caught up in whatever I'm attending to.

Maybe that's "the zone," as in "I was in the zone, man." I've heard that athletes and artists get into some altered (naturally and in a good way) state of mind that lets them really focus.

I love having my attention grabbed. My whole brain starts bouncing around with whatever is letting me ignore everything else.

But because emotions don't take a break in the cortex, they just keep on flowing, all intense, all the time. Because of this, I swing between emotions fast. So, I have a lot of big emotions, one after another, which is very exhausting. I need to figure out how to deal with the rapid-fire changes in mood, handle frustration and worry, and be around people where my outgoing nature (i.e., *impulsiveness*) and sense of humor are good things, not bad things.

It's hard to handle all this. The chapters on treatment talk about some things that can help you. For example, for awhile I went to a psychologist, and learned to pay attention (that joke, again) to what I was feeling so I could figure out when I was going to get upset or whatever. It's hard, and I don't always catch my overreaction in time, but at least I can catch it some of the time, now.

How Does It Feel?

"How Does It Feel?" are words from some ancient rock and roll song, which could be my own personal theme song, because everything, every little thing, has some emotional effect on me. It is so tiring and I am very, very, very, very sick of it. I hate writing about emotions, because then they get even more intense, but if I don't talk about them, how can I ever figure them out? I don't think I understand them myself, but I can describe how they affect me. Can anybody ever understand emotions?

So, I will talk a lot about some emotions, but mostly the emotions that usually end up making me feel bad.

Some of these emotions are Bo's and my own specialties, anxiety and depression. And anger, a specialty of adolescents everywhere, gets some time here, too.

One More Thing: Emotional Radar

Are you really aware of other people's emotions? Some people with AD/HD seem to be really sensitive to the emotions of others, while others just aren't and to them we are hypersensitive idiots. Anyway, I call it emotional radar, and mine is always set to high sensitivity, which can be bad because I sponge up other people's bad moods and carry them around until something else comes along. So I have to train myself to watch what I'm feeling because of other people's feelings. I'm not sure what you can do about this except talk to your counselor. After all, sometimes it's a good thing, like empathy. You can feel what the other person is feeling, and that helps you understand them and sympathize with them.



An Example of the Good Staff: Excitement

What about the good emotions, you might ask. Well, those are pretty easy to recognize, and I hardly ever get in trouble for the emotions that I like. The best emotion, to me, is love¹.

I also like being excited and absorbed by what I'm doing, reading, or thinking. I love feeling like that. Like when I'm lost in an idea, or in writing a story, or doing improv work, and with my friends and we're on a roll, laughing and making jokes. Singing—I can get lost in that, too. I have some pals who have AD/HD and feel that way about sports.



These times are great. I feel so free, like my maniac dog. (That's maniac, not manic as in manic-depressive, which is the old name for bipolar disorder, which one of my best pals has.) So, my maniac dog is part Australian shepherd, part something else. She's from the humane society and I think she has AD/HD. She swings between total focus and total distraction, just like me.

The excitement and freedom that I feel when I have a chance to let go and dream things up and make jokes—that kind of freedom is one of the payoffs of having AD/HD.

On to the Not-so-good Staff: Frustration and Anger

Math is an excellent source of frustration for me. Say we're doing algebra, and I understand most of the problem, right? But I'm stuck on one part near the very, very end. So I raise my hand. When I finally get called on (waiting is like poison), the teacher answers the question but begins by explaining from the very beginning, limping slowly through step after obvious step until I could scream really loud. By the time the teacher gets to the part that I didn't understand, I can't even listen anymore because I am so frustrated and angry! I'm about to explode, crawl right out of my skin. It's all I can do not to snap at the teacher to quit being stupid and tell her to get to the part I don't understand. Sometimes I do mouth off. That's even worse. No matter what, though, even if I don't explode externally, I'm exploding internally, and that means I am not listening when the teacher finally gets to the explanation of the only part I didn't get.

By the time I cool down, we are on to the next problem or in the next class period even. By then it's too late to figure out the part I didn't get. And because the teacher already explained it once, I can't very well ask again, or at least, I don't want to ask again. I feel stupid. And on top of that, I feel even dumber when I realize that

¹ What about the emotion of *like*? I don't know why *like* can't be an emotion, where *like* is a pastel shade of love.

"The life of the creative man is led, directed and controlled by boredom. Avoiding boredom is one of our most important purposes." —Saul Steinberg

I'm the only one who got so frustrated. Everybody else was able to sit there and tolerate the boring pace. Then I hate myself more. I still don't understand the math.

I'm exhausted.

And I have to listen to another boring teacher in another class, and if I manage to pay attention and not get distracted, and this happens again.... You can see the cycle.

Then I feel hopeless. I feel like such a freak. I just don't get it. Everybody else does, but not me. Then I feel so lonely and sad. And then I get even sadder, thinking about all the stuff I forget and mistakes and mouthing off and everything.

Because I know a little about AD/HD brains, I understand that this is one part of having AD/HD—because the emotion is like a roller-coaster without brakes, it keeps getting worse. I can't stop from being frustrated, because my prefrontal cortex² isn't doing its job correctly, then I get more and more frustrated. And angry.

Anger. That's probably a good way to think about frustration, since frustration makes me angry. And I said I was going to talk about anger....

What Anger Is and What Causes It

Anger is a feeling that occurs when you've been provoked, or at least when you think you've been provoked. It is likely that anger evolved to help us protect ourselves from a threat, attack, or perceived threat.

So one cause of anger might be threats, attacks, or perceived threats. Some people think that anger is a secondary emotion, that first you feel disappointed, scared, or ashamed, *then* you get angry. So you might want to think about what you felt just before you got angry.

Also, thought and emotions are linked. You make an assumption, you get mad, then you think about it, and maybe you aren't so mad.³

Anger FACTOID

Anger isn't defined as a specific disorder or syndrome in the DSM-IV (the official diagnostic guide to psychological problems), so no one has researched anger very much. To me this is like waiting 100 years to look at girls with AD/HD. Nobody thought of this?

² Hormones, too. Let's not forget to blame them.

³ According to Professor Jerry Deffenbacher, a leading researcher on anger and a professor at Colorado State University, "We have no DSM-IV anger-based disorders, hence there is poor epidemiology and data." This translates into: "We don't really know how many people have real anger problems."

How Your Body Reacts When You Are Angry

When you are angry, your heart races, face flushes, breath gets shallow, maybe your jaw or other muscles tighten up, and your stomach knots up. These symptoms are autonomic⁴—that is, they happen automatically.⁵ Take the quiz on the right and score *your* level of anger.

What your score means

- ◎ 9-15: No problem with anger.
- ◎ 16-22: Reread this section and think about how to handle it.
- ◎ 23-27: Get to work. You need to start finding a way to deal with getting mad. See the next section for suggestions.

What You Can Do When You Are Angry

What can you do about it? Actually, quite a bit. The key is to figure out what works for you. As always, your first stop is talk to some adult you trust—maybe a psychologist or counselor if you have one—and of course, a book like this might help, too. Check out the treatment chapters for information on a medication and counseling. A few things you can do to cope with anger are listed below.

Think About It

Thinking about emotions is central to cognitive-behavioral psychology, one of the most effective psychotherapy methods. Because thought and emotion are linked, if you can get at the thoughts, you can get control over the emotions they generate. Think of it this way:

1. A guy runs out of a room . . . Who cares?
2. A guy you know runs out of a room. . . Now you care, but in what way? Don't know yet.
3. A guy you have a crush on runs out of a room. . . Okay, you're sad to see him go, maybe? Or you are glad you got to see him before he left the room?

⁴ That's pronounced auto (like the car) nah mick, not autogonomic, for you Harry Potter and fantasy fans. Autonomic function is another brain activity.

⁵ More neurochemistry. You feel this way when you are angry because your body releases noradrenaline, also referred to as norepinephrine, which also, in fact, is related to dopamine release and therefore AD/HD. (We talked about this before, but here's a reminder anyway: norepinephrine, also called noradrenaline, breaks down into epinephrine, or adrenaline. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably.)

Figure out your anger score:

Question	Answer
1. I lose my temper . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
2. When I thought I did a good job, and then get a bad grade, I get really angry . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
3. I get angry when I have to slow down because somebody else made a mistake . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
4. When I am under a lot of pressure, I explode . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
5. I get mad when I'm corrected, especially if I'm corrected in front of others . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
6. When I get frustrated, I feel like bursting into tears or hitting someone or something . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
7. People who think they are always right make me mad . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
8. When I get mad, I sometimes say mean things that I wish I hadn't . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people
9. I am angry . . .	a. more than most people b. same as most people c. less than most people

Scoring Your Quiz

(By the way, any quiz you take that is in THIS BOOK, you get a perfect score.)

Write down how many in each category, then multiply

Equals:

a. More than: _____ x 3

b. Same as: _____ x 2

c. Less than: _____ x 1

TOTAL

4. A guy you have a crush on runs out of room to talk to another girl. . . . Okay, now we have a reaction of upset, maybe anger.

The emotion of anger doesn't make sense until a lot of these facts come together. And by changing the way I interpret the facts or the events, I change the way I feel, the way I react. Logic helps me avoid an explosive expression of anger. Okay, so I might still be angry, but at least I don't explode and feel like I'm out of control. It's okay to feel whatever the emotion is. Just don't act on it before you think. Your job is to keep the feeling from running your life. And if you can get yourself to think about it, the thinking delays the emotion a little, giving you a chance to calm down a little bit.

Let's go back to the example. The emotions that you might feel because the guy you like ran out of the room to talk to another girl depend on your interpretation. If you stop to think about it, there are lots of possible explanations. Maybe he is working on a school project with her. Maybe she is his cousin. Maybe even your first guess is right and he's dating her or wants to date her. In any of these cases, does it mean anything bad about you? No. It means that your timing is bad, maybe, but nothing about you. You might be disappointed, yes, but maybe you could skip feeling angry.

Strategies for Handling Anger

Here are some ideas that help specifically with anger.

Action	What the Action Does
Breathe deeply or count to ten when you begin to feel angry.	Helps you calm down so you can think about what just happened.
Get strenuous physical activity (for example, go outside and run around the school building as fast as you can, with permission, of course).	Releases internal endorphins (a kind of built-in cheer-you-up neurotransmitter) that help you get rid of the anger.
Talk to friends or at least get away from the situation.	Helps you get perspective, understand what happened and maybe find other ways to think about it, or at least cool down while you figure out what to do. If you don't have any friends around to talk to, try to write about it. Get the feeling out, but use words, not action.
Write about the situation.	By escaping from the situation and writing about what happened, you get a chance to cool down and get some perspective.

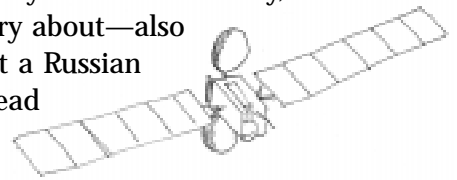
Action (cont.)	What the Action Does (cont.)
Try using humor.	Finding something funny in the situation can help break up the tension, so that you can find a way to react that isn't going to get you into trouble.
Set up an escape hatch.	Work out a deal with your teachers, family, and friends, so that if you lose your temper you can signal that you need to get away from the situation. Agree that you will deal with the situation that led to the anger, but only after you are a little calmer. This means you aren't running away. Instead, you are actively dealing with the emotion so that you can then deal with the problem without the emotion overriding the situation.
Try using empathy.	When you are losing your temper, try to put your concerns out of the way. Try to understand the situation from the other person's perspective. This can help you forgive your own anger, too.
Use the energy of anger to the problem.	But only after you have gotten a grip on the anger and aren't yelling and exploding. The norepinephrine gives you the energy just in case the situation you are in has to do with a saber-tooth tiger. Most of the time, there is no tiger, and you have all this spare energy that needs to go somewhere and can end up as anger. When you feel that surge of energy that comes with anger, divert the energy into something useful. Then you use up the energy in a good way, instead of in a way that can make the situation worse.
Learn to watch out for signs that tell you you're getting angry—the triggers.	When you feel yourself starting to get angry, you can deal with it before you lose your temper. Again, how to do that is something I am learning to do in counseling. Check out the chapters on treatment for information about what sort of treatment works.
DO NOT: hit pillows or yell.	That actually makes you madder—more aggressive. So don't.

The Bonus Conditions

Many girls with AD/HD have what I call “bonus conditions.” In books written for adults, you may see these called “comorbid” or “coexisting” conditions. What this means is that, on top of AD/HD, you have another problem with a label. The most common bonus conditions in girls with AD/HD are depression and anxiety.

What Anxiety Is and What Causes It

Anxiety is a way to say the word “worry” with extra syllables. Technically, it also means worrying lots about stuff you don’t need to worry about—also called unrealistic worries. For example, worrying about a Russian satellite dropping out of the sky and landing on your head is an unrealistic worry.



Anxiety is basically a cousin of fear.

Fear itself seems to be a pretty good idea, at least in terms of evolution. After all, being afraid helps you stay alive. If you are walking outside your school after dark, and you notice a big gang of people approaching, you had better be afraid. That fear gives you epinephrine (common name, adrenaline) that translates into extra energy in case you have to defend yourself.

That instant fear reaction is a result of information sent from your senses, by way of the brain portion called the thalamus, straight to a primitive part of the brain, the amygdala (ah MIG dah lah). This same information is also sent through the prefrontal cortex, that logical part of the brain that helps you reason through what is going on.

The cortex part comes into play, for example, when you look at the gang out of the corner of your eye and realize they are a bunch of nice kids from your high school choir. Then you relax because your brain tells you not to be afraid after all. Your brain has helped you put the fear into context. Once you’ve figured out what is going on, you aren’t afraid any more, although your heart may still be beating rapidly as a leftover from the initial rush of epinephrine/adrenaline/fear.

That same part of the brain, the one that helped you realize you didn’t need to be afraid after all, is the one that can help set off anxiety. That is, the relationship between the amygdala and the cortex causes anxiety. The cortex (and the hippocampus, the part of the brain that is key to memory) helps you recall and understand elements you should be afraid of. And if you have too many of those thoughts, then you can always sense danger and be anxious about it, even when there’s nothing around to be specifically anxious about.

Some anxiety is a good thing. Walking alone at night? Be afraid. A lot of anxiety about something unlikely to harm you, though, is not a good thing. Worrying about that falling satellite? Not worth the worry.

The key is to balance what you are worried about.

Sometimes, a little imbalance in anxiety happens to almost everybody. And almost everybody, at some point, does something stupid when they should have

known better. Maybe they weren't afraid when they should have been, so they did something stupid, like walking in the dark alone through a bad part of town. Later, they might realize that it was a stupid thing to have done, and that they should have been afraid. On the opposite end, most people also sometimes get over-anxious about some things. Test anxiety, or maybe total terror of the school dance. Overreactions, but normal overreactions.

Anxiety FACTOID: Panic Attack

Panic attacks are brief, intense periods of fear that hit you for no apparent reason. A panic attack involves three or more of the common symptoms of anxiety, which include sweating, rapid heart beat, shallow breathing, and lots more. Typically, it peaks after about ten minutes. But you still feel bad, both physically and emotionally, after such an attack. Almost everybody has a panic attack at some point or other. So one of them is okay. Twelve of them, maybe you should talk to an adult or a doctor....

Bo: Okay. My turn. I am anxious. That's more than just worried about tests. Well, it's like that, except times ten.

Maddy: More math.

Bo: I am a pro at worry. I'll worry about not worrying, if I have to. I'll find something to worry about. Then there's your basic anxiety. Tense all the time. Waiting for the next bad thing. Not just when there's a test, either. I was shocked when I found out most people don't worry all the time.

I did okay at my old school. I stuck to routine. Teachers didn't call on me much. But then I went to middle school. Tons of kids. I get a stomach-ache just remembering the first day. And the tests! The teachers took everything so seriously. I got headaches.

I thought everybody got panicked when they talked in front of the class. I thought everybody else just handled it okay. And I couldn't find things. I would try to get organized, but then I'd forget something. One time the teacher asked for my homework in front of the whole class. I couldn't find it. I felt like crying. And my heart beat so loud I thought everybody in school heard it.

Anxiety Disorders

If you are anxious often enough or intensely enough that it interferes with your day-to-day activities (like Bo describes above), you most likely have an anxiety disorder, rather than just ordinary anxiety. People with anxiety disorders need

treatment with counseling, medications, or both. There are many types of anxiety disorders, including:

- ◎ **Phobia:** Phobia is a fear of a specific thing. To be a phobia, the fear has to incapacitate you. Fear of spiders is arachnophobia. A fear of heights is acrophobia. A fear of enclosed spaces is claustrophobia.
- ◎ **Social Phobia:** Social phobia prevents someone from taking part in normal social situations. This is more than being shy. If you have a social phobia, you avoid normal social interaction because you just can't deal with it.
- ◎ **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** People with OCD repeatedly have worrisome thoughts (obsessions) that they try to deal with by repeating particular actions (compulsions). Like, if you are unreasonably worried about getting sick, then you might constantly wash your hands to get rid of germs. You wash your hands over and over, because each time you wash them, it relieves your anxiety, at least right then.
- ◎ **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** GAD means you are anxious a lot. To be more specific, GAD is diagnosed when someone is worried persistently about more than one event over at least six months. For example, say you get good grades. But you worry all the time that you are going to fail the next set of exams. That's an example of an excessive worry over a long time that may be a symptom of GAD. People with GAD feel like something bad is out there waiting to happen. You're upset a lot. You don't even know what you are worried about, a lot of the time.

Maddy: My favorite is coulrophobia, fear of clowns.

Anxiety FACTOIDS

- ◎ Specific phobias are among the most common of all psychiatric disorders, affecting up to 10 percent of the population.
- ◎ Generalized Anxiety Disorder, lasting a minimum of a year, affects an estimated 3 to 8 percent of the population.

How Your Body Reacts When You Are Anxious

Here are some signs of anxiety:

- ◎ You feel shaky or are sweating, but not because of anything you should realistically be worrying about. (Remember that satellite?)

- ⊙ You can't concentrate because you are so worried, rather than the usual AD/HD-can't-concentrate.
- ⊙ Your heart beats rapidly.
- ⊙ You are tense and can't make yourself relax.
- ⊙ You feel sick to your stomach.
- ⊙ You are afraid but you don't know what you are afraid of.
- ⊙ You feel light-headed and a little dizzy.

You might get this way when you have a big athletic meet or just before you go on stage. That's pretty normal. It's having these symptoms without any real reason over a long period of time, like six months, that should make you anxious.

No. I'm kidding. You shouldn't be anxious about being anxious. You should be getting treated for being anxious. Take the quiz below and figure out *your* level of anxiety.



Maddy: Maybe you should put sense of humor on the list of what you can do to help deal with having anxiety?

Score Your Level of Anxiety

Question	Answer	
1. Do you habitually—over the last six months—have shortness of breath or feel your heart beating fast, but for no real reason?	yes	no
2. Over the last six months, have you experienced repeated periods of panic or fear for no real reason?	yes	no
3. Over the last six months, have you had persistent pictures in your head of things you are afraid of for no reason (like getting your hands dirty)?	yes	no
4. Over the last six months, do you find that you repeat activities that don't make a lot of sense, such as checking to make sure the bedroom window is shut five or six times in a row?	yes	no
5. Do the anxiety symptoms you have sometimes make you miss an event or be late for school?	yes	no
Score the number of yes and no answers to get your TOTAL :	yes ___	no ___

Scoring Your Quiz

This one is easy. If you have any YES answers, tell your parents or teacher. Watch out for anxiety. You can do something about it!

What You Can Do When You Are Anxious

Check out the chapters on treatment for information about a medical approach and counseling. Other treatment methods include relaxation techniques, which you can learn from a doctor or counselor, or you can teach yourself from books or tapes. You can also exercise or do yoga, to help you let go of the anxiety.

The point is, DO something about it.

Retro Relaxation

The thirties—that's when stimulant treatment started for AD/HD, and, it turns out, is also the time when this relaxation technique was described. We're so retro.

Edmund Jacobson figured that mental relaxation comes from physical relaxation. Here's the technique: tighten one muscle group for 5-8 seconds at a time. (For instance, try to tighten all the muscles in your lower leg without actually moving your leg as a whole. This can take some concentration, if you're not used to it.) Then relax that group, and for 15 to 30 seconds, pay attention to how the relaxation feels. At the same time, imagine tension pouring out of you as you relax each muscle group.

Then move on to another muscle group. Usually, you start at your feet, then work up through your face. Hey, it works. Go figure. Even if you just spend a couple of minutes doing this, it really helps clear away the cobwebs.

What Depression Is and What Causes It

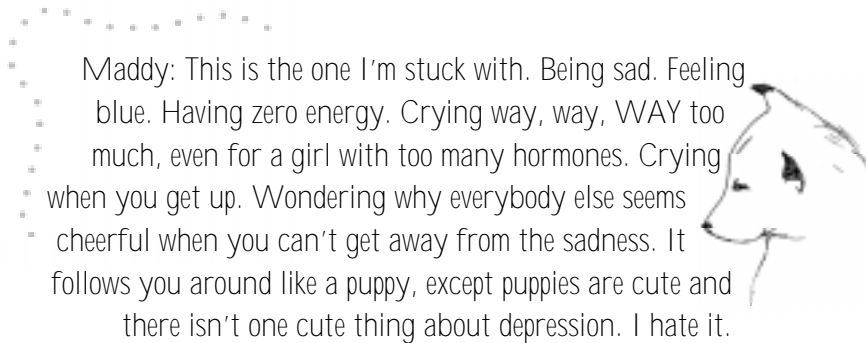
Depression refers to one or more episodes over the course of multiple weeks during which a person loses interest or no longer takes pleasure in typical daily activities. It is accompanied by four or more of these symptoms:

- ⊙ Thoughts of suicide. **IF YOU HAVE OR HAVE HAD ANY THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE, PUT THIS BOOK DOWN AND GET HELP. TELL AN ADULT OR CALL YOUR DOCTOR OR 911 OR A SUICIDE HOTLINE. DO NOT DELAY.**
- ⊙ Sleeping pattern changes (sleeping more or less than usual)
- ⊙ Appetite and weight changes
- ⊙ Problems concentrating and making decisions

- ⊙ Lethargy, decreased energy
- ⊙ Feeling worthless, guilty

Dysthymia (dis THYME ee ah) is a milder type of depression that goes on for over two years.

Women are diagnosed with depression at least twice as often as men. Not a lot of research has focused on adolescent girls. But we do know that girls with AD/HD are more likely to be depressed than boys with AD/HD. Studies show that although boys are diagnosed with AD/HD something like three times more often than girls, girls who are diagnosed are three times more likely to be depressed. Hmmm.



The good news about depression is that it has been researched a lot, and treatment can be extremely helpful.

Sadness is normal. Sadness that never goes away is not normal. That falls into the category of “watch-out.” If you are sad about an event or about something that has disappointed you, that is appropriate. Sometimes this is called situational depression.

But if you are always sad and can never pull yourself away from the sadness for long, then you may have clinical depression, which is a neurological (brain) condition that can be treated. The worst-case outcome of depression is suicide. Bad idea. Never, ever the answer.⁶

Anyway, if you think you might be depressed, or find yourself thinking about suicide, talk to somebody and get help. Tell your parents, your teachers, your priest or rabbi or minister or counselor, but tell somebody right away and repeat yourself until somebody helps you.

How Your Body Reacts When You Are Depressed

- ⊙ You may have insomnia, which means you wake up in the night and can't fall back asleep, or can't fall asleep in the first place.

⁶ When my English class performed *Romeo and Juliet*, my teacher talked about how Romeo and Juliet made “bad decisions.” Yes. That would be one way to describe their decisions.

Okay, so almost every teenager in the world has trouble falling asleep. But if it's even harder than usual to sleep, or on the other hand, you are sleeping a lot more than usual, that's a definite clue.

- ⊙ Your appetite changes significantly. For example, maybe food tastes like sand so you don't eat, or maybe you eat all the time, and this is different than the way you used to eat.
- ⊙ You withdraw from things that used to be fun. If you always enjoyed *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons*, and anything else showing on *Comedy Central*, but now nothing makes you laugh ever, that's a bad sign.
- ⊙ If you find that you are avoiding hanging out with your friends, withdrawing from things you used to like to do, that's bad.
- ⊙ If you feel hopeless or are more irritable than you can justify even using hormones and any other argument that you can think of, that's another bad sign.
- ⊙ If you feel suicidal, go get help immediately. Put down the book, and go find somebody and tell them. RIGHT AWAY. NOW.

Take the quiz on the next page and figure out *your* level of depression.

Depression FACTOID

Four to 5 percent of teenagers are clinically depressed (that means they have a condition that should be treated, as opposed to being sad, even deeply sad, but getting over it). Adult depression affects as many as 10 percent of Americans.

What You Can Do When You're Depressed

Check out the chapters on treatment for information about medication and counseling. You can also try relaxation techniques, which you can learn from a counselor or a book (or see page 56 above), yoga, and exercise. Reading about depression helps, too. But no matter what, DO something about it.

I know this sounds a lot like what I said about anger and anxiety, which it does because they are all hooked together in your brain.

Maddy: I was really scared when I started taking pills. But it was also weird to not cry all the time. Weird in a good way. For the first time, I realized it wasn't just me being a wuss and crying too much. It was that most people don't feel sad all the time. More about medicine is in the treatment chapters.

Score Your Level of Depression

Question	Answer	
1. I cry a lot more than most people seem to, and it happens a whole lot, and sometimes for no reason. (Don't count the times you cry for what you think is no reason but then your period starts, which means you were crying because of hormones, and therefore for a reason.)	yes	no
2. I don't get excited even when good things happen.	yes	no
3. A lot of the time, things seem hopeless.	yes	no
4. I feel like a failure a lot of the time, no matter how well I do on tests or on other things that I know I can do well.	yes	no
5. I feel trapped, like there's no way out.	yes	no
Score the number of yes and no answers to get your TOTAL :	yes ___	no ___

Scoring Your Quiz

This one is easy. If you have any YES answers, tell your parents or teacher. Watch out for depression. You can do something about it!

The Back Page

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Cheat Sheet

People with AD/HD are often more emotional than people without AD/HD. (Part of this relates back to brain stuff.) And since some of this has to do with impatience and a low frustration tolerance, anger often crops up, on top of the rest of the many emotions you might walk around with. Further, people with AD/HD often have a little something extra, such as anxiety and depression. Girls have these two a lot. This chapter talks about some of the things you can do with so many emotions.

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Ask Ms. ADDvice Lady

Dear Ms. ADDvice Lady:

Sometimes at school I get so frustrated I cry. Then my eyes are all red and everybody asks what the matter is. I HATE that. What should I say?

Weeping Willow

Dear Willow:

Crying is a perfectly reasonable response to many situations, and further, other girls may well cry during school whether or not they have AD/HD. Regardless of the general popularity of crying or at the least its relatively common appearance, I agree that you may not want to explain your emotional state to just anyone.

As always, it depends who's asking how you are doing. If the asker is a friendly person, simply saying, "I got upset, but I'm okay now," is clear, unambiguous, truthful, and to the point. If the question is "What's wrong?," I would either go ahead and talk about it, or say, "I'm okay. Look, I have to get to class."

If the person asking is not a friendly person, then you may want to provide a distracting answer that isn't a lie, but also doesn't directly answer the question. For example, "I might be coming down with a cold or something." Alternatively, "I might have allergies." They are both always true, regardless of

whether you've just been crying. But remember that typically the truth is your best ally, and no matter what, don't lie.

It is useful to plan ahead so that you know what you feel like answering, though.

Ms. ADDvice Lady

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Fun Facts to Forget

Humans have three kinds of tears:

- ⊙ **basal tears**, continuously produced, providing lubrication in your eyes;
- ⊙ **irritant or reflex tears**, which is the eye watering that occurs when you get something in your eyes;
- ⊙ **emotional tears**, which we produce when extremely sad or happy.

Basal and irritant tears are made primarily of water and salts, with a little bit of protein tossed in. Emotional tears, though, contain 25 percent more protein than the other two kinds—and this protein is the result of stress hormone build-up. Once the build-up of stress hormones is relieved, people feel better.

One more fun fact to forget: men's tear glands are structurally smaller than women's tear glands.

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